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LIVING TO GOD IN SMALL THINGS.

LUKE xvi. 10.—*He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.*

A READINESS to do some great thing is not peculiar to Naaman the Syrian. There are many Christians who can never find a place large enough to do their duty. They must needs strain after great changes, and their works must utter themselves by a loud report. Any reform in society, short of a revolution, any improvement in character, less radical than that of conversion, is too faint a work, in their view, to be much valued. Nor is it merely ambition, but often it is a truly Christian zeal, guarded by no sufficient views of the less imposing matters of life, which betrays men into such impressions. If there be any thing, in fact, wherein the views of God and the impressions of men are apt to be at a total variance, it is in respect to the solemnity and importance of ordinary duties. The hurtfulness of mistake here, is of course very great. Trying always to do great things, to have extraordinary occasions every day, or to produce extraordinary changes, when small ones are quite as much needed, ends, of course, in defeat and dissipation. It produces a sort of religion in the gross, which is no religion in particular. My text leads me to speak—

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING TO GOD ON COMMON OCCASIONS
AND IN SMALL THINGS.

"He that is faithful in that which is least," says the Savior, "is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." This was a favorite sentiment with him. In his sermon on the mount, it was thus expressed—Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. And when he rebuked the Pharisees, in their tything of mint, anise, and cummin, he was careful to speak very guardedly—These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. It will instruct us in prosecuting this subject—

1. To notice how little we know concerning the relative importance of events and duties. We use the terms *great* and *small* in speaking of actions, occasions, plans, and duties, only in reference to their mere outward look and first impression. Some of the most latent agents and mean-looking substances in nature, are yet the most operative; but yet, when we speak of natural objects, we call them great or small, not according to their operativeness, but according to size, count, report, or show. So it comes to pass, when we are classing actions, duties, or occasions, that we call a certain class great and another small, when really the latter are many fold more important and influential than the former. We may suppose, for illustration, two transactions in business, as different in their nominal amount as a million of dollars and a single dollar. The former we call a large transaction, the latter a small one. But God might reverse these terms. He would have no such thought as the counting of dollars. He would look, first of all, at the principle involved in the two cases. And here he would discover, not unlikely, that the nominally small one, owing to the nature of the transaction, or to the humble condition of the parties, or to their peculiar temper and disposition, took a deeper hold of their being, and did more to settle or unsettle great and everlasting principle, than the other. Next, perhaps, he would look at the consequences of the two transactions, as developed in the great future; and here he would perhaps discover that the one which seems to us the smaller, is the hinge of vastly greater consequences than the other. If the dollars had been sands of dust, they would not have had less weight in the divine judgment.

We are generally ignorant of the real moment of events, which we think we understand. Almost every person can recollect one or

more instances, where the whole after-current of his life was turned by some single word, or some incident, so trivial as scarcely to fix his notice at the time. On the other hand, many great crises of danger—many high and stirring occasions, in which, at the time, his total being was absorbed, have passed by, leaving no trace of effect on his permanent interests, and are well nigh vanished from his memory. The conversation of the stage-coach is often preparing results, which the solemn assembly and the most imposing and eloquent rites will fail to produce. What countryman, knowing the dairyman's daughter, could have suspected that she was living to a mightier purpose and result, than almost any person in the church of God, however eminent? The outward of occasions and duties is, in fact, almost no index of their importance; and our judgments concerning what is great and small, are without any certain validity. These terms, as we use them, are, in fact, only words of outward description, not words of definite measurement.

2. It is to be observed, that even as the world judges, small things constitute almost the whole of life. The great days of the year, for example, are few, and when they come, they seldom bring any thing great to us. And the matter of all common days is made up of little things, or ordinary and stale transactions. Scarcely once in a year does any thing really remarkable befall us. If I were to begin and give an inventory of the things you do in any single day, your muscular motions, each of which is accomplished by a separate act of will, the objects you see, the words you utter, the contrivances you frame, your thoughts, passions, gratifications, and trials, many of you would not be able to hear it recited with sobriety. But three hundred and sixty-five such days make up a year, and a year is a twentieth, fiftieth, or seventieth part of your life. And thus, with the exception of some few striking passages, or great and critical occasions, perhaps not more than five or six in all, your life is made up of common, and as men are wont to judge, unimportant things. But yet, at the end, you have done up an amazing work, and fixed an amazing result. You stand at the bar of God, and look back on a life made up of small things—but yet a life, O how momentous, for good or evil!

3. It very much exalts, as well as sanctions, the view I am advancing, that God is so observant of small things. He upholds the sparrow's wing, clothes the lily with his own beautifying hand, and numbers the hairs of his children. He holds the balancings of the clouds. He maketh small the drops of rain. It astonishes all thought to observe the minuteness of God's government, and of the natural and common processes which he carries on from day to day. His domin-

ions are spread out, system beyond system, system above system, filling all height and latitude, but he is never lost in the vast or magnificent. He descends to an infinite detail, and builds a little universe in the smallest things. He carries on a process of growth in every tree, and flower, and living thing; accomplishes in each an internal organization and works the functions of an internal laboratory, too delicate all for eye or instrument to trace. He articulates the members and directs the instincts of every living mote that shines in the sunbeam. As when we ascend towards the distant and the vast, so when we descend towards the minute, we see his attention acuminated, and his skill concentrated on his object; and the last discernible particle dies out of our sight with the same divine glory on it as on the last orb that glimmers in the skirt of the universe. God is as careful to finish the mote as the planet, both because it consists only with his perfection to finish every thing, and because the perfection of his greatest structures is the result of perfection in their smallest parts or particles. On this patience of detail rests all the glory and order of the created universe, spiritual and material. God could thunder the year round; he could shake the ribs of the world with perpetual earthquakes; he could blaze on the air, and brush the affrighted mountains, each day, with his comets. But if he could not feed the grass with his dew, and breathe into the little lungs of his insect family; if he could not expend his care on small things, and descend to an interest in their perfection, his works would be only crude and disjointed machines, compounded of mistakes and malformations, without beauty and order, and fitted to no perfect end.

The works of Christ are, if possible, a still brighter illustration of the same truth. Notwithstanding the vast stretch and compass of the work of redemption, it is a work of the most humble detail in its style of execution. The Savior could have preached a sermon on the mount every morning. Each night he could have stilled the sea, before his astonished disciples, and shown the conscious waves lulling into peace under his feet. He could have transfigured himself before Pilate and the astonished multitudes of the temple. He could have made visible ascensions in the noon of every day, and revealed his form standing in the sun, like the angel of the apocalypse. But this was not his mind. The incidents of which his work is principally made up, are, humanly speaking, very humble and unpretending. The most faithful pastor in the world was never able, in any degree, to approach the Savior, in the lowliness of his manner and his attention to humble things. His teachings were in retired places, and his illustrations drawn from ordinary affairs. If the finger of faith

touched him in the crowd, he knew the touch and distinguished also the faith. He reproved the ambitious housewifery of an humble woman. After he had healed a poor being, blind from his birth—a work transcending all but divine power—he returned and sought him out, as the most humble Sabbath-school teacher might have done; and when he had found him, cast out and persecuted by men, he taught him privately the highest secrets of his Messiahship. When the world around hung darkened in sympathy with his cross, and the earth was shaking with inward amazement, he himself was remembering his mother, and discharging the filial cares of a good son. And when he burst the bars of death, its first and final conqueror, he folded the linen clothes and the napkin, and laid them in order apart, showing that, in the greatest things, he had a set purpose also concerning the smallest. And thus, when perfectly scanned, the work of Christ's redemption, like the created universe, is seen to be a vast orb of glory, wrought up out of finished particles. Now a life of great and prodigious exploits would have been comparatively an easy thing for him, but to cover himself with beauty and glory in small things, to fill and adorn every little human occasion, so as to make it divine—this was a work of skill, which no mind or hand was equal to, but that which shaped the atoms of the world. Such every where is God. He no where overlooks or despises small things.

4. It is a fact of history and of observation, that all efficient men, while they have been men of comprehension, have also been men of detail. I wish it were possible to produce as high an example of this two-fold character among the servants of God and benevolence in these times, as we have in that fiery prodigy of war and conquest, who, in the beginning of the present century, desolated Europe. Napoleon was the most effective man in modern times—some will say, of all times. The secret of his character was, that while his plans were more vast, more various, and, of course, more difficult than those of other men, he had the talent, at the same time, to fill them up with perfect promptness and precision, in every particular of execution. His vast and daring plans would have been visionary in any other man; but with him every vision flew out of his brain like a chariot of iron; because it was filled up, in all the particulars of execution, to be a solid and compact framework in every part. His armies were together only one great engine of desolation, of which he was the head or brain. Numbers, spaces, times, were all distinct in his eye. The wheeling of every legion, however remote, was mentally present to him. The tramp of every foot sounded in his ear.

The numbers were always supplied, the spaces passed over, the times met, and so the work was done. The nearest moral approximation I know of, was Paul the apostle. Paul had great principles, great plans, and a great enthusiasm. He had the art, at the same time, to bring his great principles into a powerful application to his own conduct, and to all the common affairs of all the disciples in his churches. He detected every want, understood every character; set his guards against those whom he distrusted; kept all his work turning in a motion of discipline; prompted to every duty. You will find his epistles distinguished by great principles; and, at the same time, by a various and circumstantial attention to all the common affairs of life; and, in that, you have the secret of his efficiency. There must be detail in every great work. It is an element of effectiveness, which no reach of plan, no enthusiasm of purpose, can dispense with. Thus, if a man conceives the idea of becoming eminent in learning, but cannot toil through the million of little drudgeries necessary to carry him on, his learning will be soon told. Or if a man undertakes to become rich, but despises the small and gradual advances by which wealth is ordinarily accumulated, his expectations will, of course, be the sum of his riches. Accurate and careful detail, the minding of common occasions and small things, combined with general scope and vigor, is the secret of all the efficiency and success in the world. God has so ordered things, that great and sudden leaps are seldom observable. Every advance in the general must be made by advances in particular. The trees and the corn do not leap up suddenly into maturity, but they climb upward, by little and little, and after the minutest possible increment. The orbs of heaven, too, accomplish their circles not by one or two extraordinary starts or springs, but by travelling on through paces and roods of the sky. It is thus, and only thus, that any disciple will become efficient in the service of his Master. He cannot do up his works of usefulness by the prodigious stir and commotion of a few extraordinary occasions. Laying down great plans, he must accomplish them by great industry, by minute attentions, by saving small advances, by working out his way as God shall assist him.

5. It is to be observed, that there is more of real piety in adorning one small than one great occasion. This may seem paradoxical, but what I intend will be seen by one or two illustrations. I have spoken of the minuteness of God's works. When I regard the eternal God, as engaged in polishing an atom, or elaborating the functions of a mote invisible to the eye, what evidence do I there receive of his desire to perfect his works! No gross and mighty world,

however plausibly shaped, would yield a hundredth part the intensity of evidence. An illustration from human things will present a closer parallel. It is perfectly well understood, or if not, it should be, that almost any husband would leap into the sea, or rush into a burning edifice, to rescue a perishing wife. But to anticipate the convenience or happiness of a wife in some small matter, the neglect of which would be unobserved, is a more eloquent proof of tenderness. This shows a mindful fondness, which wants occasions in which to express itself. And the smaller the occasion seized upon, the more intensely affectionate is the attention paid. Piety towards God may be well tested or measured, in the same way. Peter found no difficulty in drawing his sword and fighting for his Master, even at the hazard of his life, though but an hour or less afterward he forsook him and denied him. His valor on that great and exciting occasion was no proof of his piety. But when the gentle Mary came, with her box of ointment, and poured it on the Savior's head—an act which satisfied no want, met no exigency, and was of no use, except as a gratuitous and studied proof of her attachment to Jesus—he marks it as an eminent example of piety; saying—"Verily I say unto you, whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the world, there also shall this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

My brethren, this piety which is faithful in that which is least, is really a more difficult piety than that which triumphs and glares on high occasions. Our judgments are apt to be dazzled by a vain admiration of the more public attempts and the more imposing manifestations of occasional zeal. It requires less piety, I verily believe, to be a martyr for Christ, than it does to love a powerless enemy; or to maintain a gentle spirit in the midst of provocations; or to look upon the success of a rival without envy; or even to maintain a perfect and guileless integrity in the common transactions of life. Precisely this, in fact, is the lesson which history teaches. How many, alas! of those who have died in the manner of martyrdom, manifestly sought that distinction, and brought it on themselves by instigation of a mere fanatical ambition! Such facts seem designed to show us that the common spheres of life and business, the small matters of the street, the shop, the hearth, and the table, are more genial to true piety, than any artificial and extraordinary scenes of a more imposing description. Excitement, ambition, a thousand questionable causes, may elevate us occasionally to great attempts; but they will never lead us into the more humble duties of constancy and godly industry; or teach us to adorn the unpretending spheres of life with a heavenly spirit. We love to do

great things ; our natural pride would be greatly pleased, if God had made the sky taller, the world larger, and given us a more royal style of life and duty. But he understands us well. His purpose is to heal our infirmity ; and with this very intent, I am persuaded, he has ordained these humble spheres of action, so that no ostentation, no great and striking explosions of godliness shall tempt our heart. And in the same way, his word declares, that bestowing all one's goods to feed the poor, or giving his body to be burned, and of consequence, that great speeches and donations, that a mighty zeal for reform, that a prodigious jealousy for sound doctrine, without something better—without charity, profiteth nothing. And the picture of charity is humble enough. It suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself ; is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly ; seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

6. The importance of living to God, in ordinary and small things, is seen, in the fact that character, which is the end of religion, is in its very nature a growth. Conversion is a great change ; old things are passed away ; behold all things are become new. This however is the language of a hope or confidence, somewhat prophetic, exulting, at the beginning, in the realization of future victory. The young disciple, certainly, is far enough from a consciousness of complete deliverance from sin. In that respect, his work is but just begun. He is now in the blade ; we shall see him next in the ear ; and after that, he will ripen to the full corn in the ear. His character, as a man and a Christian, is to accomplish its stature by growing. And all the offices of life, domestic, social, civil, useful, are contrived of God to be the soil, as Christ is the sun, of such a growth. All the cares, wants, labors, dangers, accidents, intercourses of life, are adjusted for the very purpose of exercising and ripening character. They are precisely adapted for this end, by God's all-perfect wisdom. This, in fact, is the grand philosophy of the structure of all things. And, accordingly, there never has been a great and beautiful character, which has not become so by filling well the ordinary and smaller offices appointed of God.

The wonderful fortunes of Joseph seem, at first, to have fallen suddenly upon him, and altogether by a miracle. But a closer attention to his history will show you that he rose only by a gradual progress, and by the natural power of his virtues. The astonishing art he had of winning the confidence of others, had, after all, no magic in it save the magic of goodness ; and God assisted him, only as he assists other good men. The growth of his fortunes was the shadow

only of his growth in character. By his assiduity, he made every thing prosper; and by his good faith, he won the confidence, first of Potiphar, then of the keeper of the prison, then of Pharaoh himself. And so he grew up gently and silently till the helm of the Egyptian kingdom was found in his hand.

David the king of Israel, was only David the young shepherd, grown up to a fuller stature of intelligence, goodness, and personal command. He tried his hand first with the lambs and the sheep, then with the lion and the bear, and afterwards with Goliath. Had he not been a good shepherd he would not have been a good champion; had he not been a good champion, he would not have been king of Israel.

Peter, too, after he had flourished so vauntingly with his sword, entered on a growing and faithful life. From an ignorant fisherman, he became a skilful writer, a finished Christian, and a teacher of faithful living, in the common offices of life. He occupied his great apostleship in exhorting subjects to obey the ordinances of governors for the Lord's sake; servants to be subject to their masters; wives to study such a carriage as would win their unbelieving husbands; and husbands to give honor to the wife, as being heirs together of the grace of life. But in a manner to comprehend every thing good, he said: Giving all diligence (this is the true notion of Christian excellence)—giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. The impression is unavoidable, that he now regarded religion, not as a sword fight, but as a growth of holy character, kept up by all diligence in the walks of life.

Every good example in the word of God, is an illustration of the same truth. To finish a character on a sudden, or by any but ordinary duties, carefully and piously done, by a mere religion of Sundays and birth-days, and revivals and contributions, and orthodoxies, and public reforms, is no where undertaken. They watered the plant in secret, trained it up at family altars, strengthened it in the exposures of business, till it became a beautiful and heavenly growth, and ready, with all its blooming fruit, to adorn the Paradise of God.

It ought also to be noticed, under this head, that all the mischiefs which befall Christian character and destroy its growth, are such as lie in the ordinary humble duties of life. Christians do not fall back into declension or disgraceful apostacy, on a sudden, or by the over-coming power of great and strange temptations. They are stolen away rather by little and little, and almost insensibly to themselves.

They commonly fall into some lightness of carriage, some irritation of temper in their family or business, some neglect of duty to children, apprentices, or friends, some artfulness, some slight of integrity in business. These are the beginnings of evil. At length they grow a little more remiss. They begin to slight their secret duties. The world and its fashions become more powerful, and they yield a little farther; till at length they are utterly fallen from the spirit and life of Christians. And thus, you perceive that all the dangers which beset our piety, lie in the humble and ordinary matters of life. Here then is the place where religion must make her conquests. Here she must build her barriers and take her stand. And if it be a matter of consequence that the people of God should live constant and godly lives; that they should grow in the strength of their principles, and the beauty of their example; that the church should clear herself of all reproach, and stand invested with honor in the sight of all mankind,—if this be important, so important is it that we live well in small things, and adorn the common incidents of life with a heavenly temper and practice. Religion must forever be unstable, the people of Christ must fall into declension and disgrace, if it be not understood that here is the true field of the Christian life.

These illustrations of the importance of living to God in ordinary and common things might be carried to almost any extent; but I will arrest the subject here, and proceed to suggest some applications which may be useful.

1. Private Christians are here instructed in the true method of Christian progress and usefulness. It is a first truth with you all, I doubt not, brethren, that divine aid and intercourse are your only strength and reliance. You know, too well, the infirmity of your best purposes and endeavors, to hope for any thing but defeat, without the spirit of God dwelling in you and superintending your warfare. I show you here in what manner you may secure this divine indwelling permanently. It is not by attempts above your capacity, or by the invention of great and extraordinary occasions; but it is by living unto God daily. It is by industry, watchfulness, and a disposition to cherish all good tempers and graces. If you feel the necessity of making spiritual attainments, of growing in holiness; if you think as little of mere starts and explosions in religious zeal as they deserve, and as much of growths, habits, and purified affections as God does, you will have a delightful work to prosecute in the midst of all your ordinary cares and employments, and you will have the inward witness of divine communion ever vouchsafed you. The sins, by which God's spirit is ordinarily grieved,

are the sins of small things—laxities in keeping the temper, slight neglects of duty, lightness, sharpness of dealing. If it is your habit to walk with God in the humblest occupations of your days, it is very nearly certain that you will be filled with the Spirit always.

If it be a question with you, how to overcome bad and pernicious habits, the mode is here before you. The reason why those who are converted to Christ, often make so poor a work of rectifying their old habits, is that they lay down their work in the very places where it needs to be prosecuted most carefully, i. e. in their common employments. They do not live to God in that which is least. They reserve their piety for those exercises, public and private, which are immediately religious, and so a wide door is left open in all the common duties of life for their old habits to break in and take them captive. As if it were enough, in shutting out a flood, to dike the higher points of the ground and leave the lower!

If the question be, in what manner you may grow in knowledge and intellectual strength, the answer is readily given. You can do it by no means save that of pertinacious, untiring application. No one becomes a Christian who cannot by the cultivation of thought, and by acquiring a well-discriminated knowledge of the scriptures, make himself a gift of four fold, and perhaps even a hundred fold value to the church. This he can do by industry, by improving small opportunities, and, not least, by endeavoring to realize the principles and the beauty of Christ in all his daily conduct. In this point of view, religion is cultivation itself, and that of the noblest kind. And never does it truly justify its nature, except when it is seen elevating the mind, the manners, the whole moral dignity of the subject.

Why is it that a certain class of men, who never thrust themselves on public observation, by any very signal acts, do yet attain to a very commanding influence, and leave a deep and lasting impression on the world? They are the men who thrive by constancy and by means of small advances, just as others do who thrive in wealth. They live to God in the common doings of their daily life, as well as in the more extraordinary occasions, in which they mingle. In this way, they show themselves to be actuated by good principle, not from respect to the occasions where it may be manifested, but from respect to principle itself. And their carefulness to honor God in humble things, is stronger proof to men of their uprightness, than the most distinguished acts or sacrifices. Such persons operate principally by the weight of confidence and moral respect they acquire, which is the most legitimate and powerful action in the world. At first, it is not felt, because it is noiseless, and is not thoroughly appreciated. It is

action without pretence, without attack, and therefore, perhaps, without notice for a time. But by degrees the personal motives begin to be understood, and the beauty and moral dignity of the life are felt. No proclamation of an aim or purpose has, in the mean time, gone before the disciple to awaken suspicion or start opposition. The simple power of his goodness and uprightness flows out as an emanation on all around him. He shines like the sun, not because he purposes to shine, but because he is full of light. The bad man is rebuked, the good man strengthened by his example; every thing evil and ungraceful is ashamed before him, every thing right and lovely is made stronger and lovelier. And now, if he has the talent to undertake some great enterprise of reform or of benevolence, in the name of his Master, he has something already prepared in the good opinions of mankind, to soften or neutralize the pretence of such attempts, and give him favor in them. Or, if a Christian of this stamp has not the talents or standing necessary to lead in the more active forms of enterprise, he will yet accomplish a high and noble purpose in his life. The silent savor of his name may, perhaps, do more good after he is laid in his grave, than abler men do by the most active efforts. I often hear mentioned, by the Christians of our city, the name of a certain godly man, who has been dead many years; and he is always spoken of with so much respectfulness and affection, that I, a stranger of another generation, feel his power, and the sound of his name refreshes me. That man was one who lived to God in small things. I know this, not by any description which has thus set forth his character, but from the very respect and homage with which he is named. Virtually, he still lives among us, and the face of his goodness shines upon all our Christian labors. And is it not a delightful aspect of the Christian faith, that it opens so sure a prospect of doing good, on all who are in humble condition, or whose talents are too feeble to act in the more public spheres of enterprise and duty? Such are called to act by their simple goodness more than others are; and who has not felt the suspicion that such, when faithful, do actually discharge a calling the more exalted because of its unmixed nature? If there were none of these unpretending but beautiful examples, blooming in depression, sweetening affliction by their Christian patience, adorning poverty by their high integrity, and dying in the Christian heroism of faith,—if, I say, there were no such examples making their latent impressions, in the heart of the public mind, of the dignity and truth of the gospel, who shall prove that our great men, who are supposed to accomplish so much by their eloquence, their notable sacrifices and far-reaching plans, would not utterly fail in them? How-

ever this may be, we have reason enough, all of us, for living to God in every sphere of life. Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness AT ALL TIMES.

2. Our subject enables us to offer some useful suggestions, concerning the manner in which churches may be made to prosper.

First of all, brethren, you will have a care to maintain your purity and your honor, by the exercise of a sound discipline. And here you will be faithful in that which is least. You will not wait until a crisis comes, or a flagrant case arises, where the hand of extermination is needed. That is often a very cruel discipline, rather than one of brotherly love. Nothing, of course, should be done in a meddlesome spirit; for this would be more mischievous than neglect. But small things will yet be watched, the first gentle declinings noted and faithfully but kindly reproved. Your church should be like a family, not waiting till the ruin of a member is complete and irremediable, but acting preventively. This would be a healthy discipline, and it is the only sort, I am persuaded, on which God will ever smile.

The same spirit of watchfulness and attention is necessary to all the solid interests of your church. It is not enough that you attempt to bless it occasionally by some act of generosity or some fit of exertion. Your brethren, suffering from injustice or evil report, must have your faithful sympathy; such as are struggling with adversity must have your aid; when it is possible, the more humble and private exercises of your church must be attended. It is your solemn duty also to cherish the good name, and encourage the good endeavors of your pastor; to abstain especially from light and flippant criticisms, and excuse the foibles which he has in common with all mankind; each of these points needs to be insisted on in a whole discourse. How many, alas! are they in our churches who injure them more in slight defects or breaches of duty, than they can possibly advance them in their highest efforts of zeal.

The impression cannot be too deeply fixed, that a church must grow chiefly by its industry and the personal growth of its members. Some churches seem to feel that, if any thing is to be done, some great operation must be started. They cannot even repent without concert and a general ado. Have you not the preaching of God's word, brethren, at the mouth of his chosen servant? Have you not also families, friendships, interchanges of business, meetings for prayer, brotherly vows, opportunities of private and public charity? Do not despise these stale occasions—God has not planned the world badly. Christ did not want higher occasions than the Father gave him. The grand maxim of his mission was, that the humblest spheres give the

greatest weight and dignity to principles—He was the good carpenter, saving the world! Rightly viewed, my brethren, there are no small occasions in this world, as in our haste we too often think. Great principles, principles sacred even to God, are at stake in every moment of life. What we want, therefore, is not invention, but industry; not the production of new and extraordinary occasions, but the realizing of our principles by adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

One of the best securities for the growth and prosperity of a church, is to be sought in a faithful exhibition of religion in families. Here is a law of increase, which God has incorporated in his church, and by which he designs to give her strength and encouragement. But why is it—I ask the question with grief and pain—why is it that so many children, so many apprentices and servants are seen to grow up, or to live many years in Christian families, without any regard, or even respect for religion? It is because their parents, guardians, or masters have that sort of piety, which can flourish only like Peter's sword, on great occasions. Then, perhaps, they are exceedingly full of piety, and put forth many awkward efforts to do good in their families; enough, it may be, to give them a permanent disgust for religious things. But when the great occasion is past, their work is done up. A spirit of worldliness now rolls in again, a want of conscience begins to appear, a light and carnal air of conversation to show itself. The preaching of the gospel is very critically, and somewhat wittily canvassed on the Sabbath. The day itself, in the mean time, fares scarcely better than the preacher. It is shortened by degrees at both ends, and again, by a newspaper or some trifling conversation, in the middle. There is no instructive remark at the family prayers, and perhaps no family instruction any where. There is no effort to point the rising family towards a better world, and apparently no living for such a world. Bad tempers are manifested in government and in business. Arts are practised below dignity and wide of integrity. How is it possible that the children and youth of a family should not learn to despise such a religion? How different would be the result, if there were a simple unostentatious piety kept up with constancy, and the fear of God were seen to be a controlling principle, in all the daily conduct and plans of life! I have heard of many striking cases of conversion, which were produced, under God, by simply seeing the godly life of a Christian in his family, without a word of direct address and in a time of general inattention to religious things. In such a family every child and inmate will certainly respect religion. And the church, in fact, may count on receiving

a constant and certain flow of increase from the bosom of such families.

I will not pursue this head farther. But feel assured of this, brethren, that an every-day religion; one that loves the duties of our common walk; one that makes an honest man; one that accomplishes an intellectual and moral growth in the subject; one that works in all weather, and improves all opportunities, will best, and most healthily promote the growth of a church, and the power of the gospel. God will never fail to put honor on such a style of piety.

Finally, some useful hints are suggested to the ministers of Christ, here present, in regard to the conduct and scope of our office.

It is not a full discharge of this glorious office, that much zeal be expended in fostering revivals of religion; not enough that the matter of conversion, as it is technically called, be much and successfully labored for. Nor if to revivals and conversions, be added the promotion of religious and beneficent societies, is that enough. The minister of God falls below his office, and narrows down the broad field of his profession, if he does not feel that his duty is to superintend the total character of his people. The declaration so often heard, that the great object of the gospel is the conversion of men, is certainly objectionable. It leads to a wrong impression, and a mistaken practice. What is conversion, but simply the beginning of a certain total work; and what work is this, but to present the sinful and lost race of man faultless before God? Whom we preach, says an Apostle, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present the man perfect in Christ Jesus. This is the high purport of the ministerial office. It goes not after any mere class of occasions, however glorious and delightful to enjoy; it is not satisfied with any mere beginnings of good. But it takes up the grand total work of regenerating sinful character. Its aim and endeavor is to enlighten and strengthen the mind, by filling it with the knowledge of God; to rectify bad habits, to chasten evil tempers, to uproot false principles and establish true ones, to make the subjects of the gospel better men in their families, their business, and in every sphere of life; to exalt every thing that is low in them; to ennoble them in every thing, to make them happier, more respected, the friends of truth, the benefactors of man, the servants of God,—in the words of inspiration, it is to present unto the Savior a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. What other class of God's servants have as high an end before them? To take up sinful man, in all his degraded views, bad principles, and generally corrupt lusts, to teach him, to persuade him, to subdue him, to act upon him in all his

daily relations, and work him at length into the complete image of God—this surely is an office fit to inspire an angel !

What qualifications, too, does it demand ! How much of good character, first of all in us ! Then how nice a discernment of what is comely and good, in all the various matters of common life ! how much of patience and holy pertinacity ! how much industry, versatility, and skill, in applying the great principles of religion to all the particular defects and errors of our people !

But God prescribes our office ; and it were wrong not to believe that if we undertake God's real work, he will furnish us to it, and give us pleasure in it. He will transfuse into us some portion of his own versatility ; he will attract us into a nicer observation of his wisdom in our humble duties and concerns. We shall more admire the healthiness of that which grows up in God's natural spring-times, and ripens in the air of his common days. The ordinary will thus grow dignified and sacred in our sight ; and, without discarding all invention in respect to means and opportunities, we shall yet especially love to go after our people, where God daily leads them, and teach them to live unto God.

It was the taste of our blessed Master, my brethren, to make the ordinary glow with mercy and goodness. Him we are to follow. We are to work after no set fashion of high endeavor, but to walk with Him, performing as it were, a ministry on foot, that we may stop at the humblest matters and dispense our doctrine. To keep the least commandments, and to teach men so, is to constitute the very grandeur of our mission, and the brightness of our crown. The same shall be called GREAT in the kingdom of heaven.